The True Nature of Reality: A Comparative Study

Diamond Sutra and Vimalakīrti Sutra

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of Buddhist Philosophy Studies at

Sakya Buddha University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art

in

Buddhist Philosophy

by

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Spring 2025

APPROVAL PAGE FOR GRADUATE

Approved and recommended for acceptance as a thesis in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Art in Buddhist Philosophy.

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The True Nature of Reality: A Comparative study Diamond Sutra and Vimalakirti Sutra

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at any other institution, and that it is entirely my own work.

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Acknowledgements

I am honored to express my profound gratitude to the many individuals and institutions who have supported me throughout my Master journey, without whom this achievement would not have been possible.

Firstly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Venerable Master Thích Huyền Châu for opening the path of Buddhist learning and creating the conditions for us to approach the scriptures with sincerity and depth. Through your guidance, we have been able to gradually penetrate the meaning of the Dharma.

I am also immensely grateful to my research method Dr. Victor Gabriel and my research committee members, Dr. John Freese, for their constant guidance, constructive criticism, unwavering encouragement and invaluable support during the challenging process of writing this thesis.

My heartfelt appreciation goes out to the professors of Sakya Buddha University who have generously and enthusiastically guided us throughout this program. Your wisdom and dedication have been invaluable to my learning journey.

Special thanks are due to the teachers at the Faculty of Buddhist Studies, Sakya Buddha University, and the Vietnamese Buddhism program that I have been honored to study for the past six years. Your tireless devotion and compassionate teaching have helped us absorb the Dharma in both heart and mind. Without your support, I would not have reached this milestone.

Abstract

This thesis conducts a comparative study of two foundational Mahāyāna scriptures the Diamond Sutra and the Vimalakīrti Sutra through six core themes: emptiness (śūnyatā), non-duality, language and reality, compassion, critique of views, and ultimate wisdom. While both texts are grounded in the central Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness, they convey their insights through distinct pedagogical styles: the Diamond Sutra employs logical deconstruction and paradox, whereas the Vimalakīrti Sutra utilizes narrative drama, satire, and the performative silence of Vimalakīrti to express inexpressible truths.

Both sutras reject fixed views and dualistic thinking, highlighting that true wisdom transcends conceptual elaboration. They critique the limitations of language, affirming that ultimate reality cannot be captured in words. Compassion, central to the Bodhisattva path, is presented as action grounded in the realization of emptiness, egoless and non-attached in the Diamond Sutra, and skillfully adaptive in the Vimalakīrti Sutra. Ultimately, both texts guide practitioners toward a direct, non-conceptual realization of reality liberation marked by silence, wisdom, and boundless compassion.

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1. Chapter One: Introduction

The inspiration for this thesis arises from a deep personal question: What is the true nature of reality, and how can we live in alignment with it? In search of an answer, I turned to two of the most revered sutras in Mahāyāna Buddhism the Diamond Sutra, a key text within the Mahāprajñāpāramitā tradition, and the Vimalakīrti Sutra, known for its unconventional, profound, and transformative teachings.

The Diamond Sutra has long been honored for its precision and its capacity to express the core of the Buddha's teachings in concise yet powerful terms. At its heart is the teaching of "subduing the deluded mind and abiding in the true mind,"[1]challenging our conceptual attachments and leading us to realize the illusory nature of the self and phenomena. In parallel, the Vimalakīrti Sutra offers a radical and eloquent presentation of non-duality, often expressed through paradox and silence. It subverts hierarchical roles, questions conventional norms, and points to the ineffable nature of truth through the example of a lay Bodhisattva's skillful means. I chose this comparative topic because these two sutras, while distinct in form and voice, both powerfully address the core challenges of spiritual life: how to overcome ignorance, attachment, and dualistic thinking. They teach that emptiness is not a passive void, but a dynamic ground from which compassion, wisdom, and freedom arise. This understanding transcends the materialistic and ego centered worldview of contemporary society, inviting us to awaken to our interdependent and boundless nature.

[1] Red Pine, trans., The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom; Text and Commentaries (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2001), 59.

The teachings in these sutras are not abstract philosophies, they are medicine for the suffering caused by clinging to an impermanent and separate self. They reveal how ignorance fuels the endless cycle of birth and death, like water hyacinths drifting aimlessly. The Buddha's profound guidance helps us uproot two deep afflictions: attachment to self and attachment to phenomena. Through deep contemplation of emptiness and non-duality, we learn to let go of mistaken views and return to the clarity and spaciousness of the true mind.

In essence, both texts remind us that liberation is possible not through escaping the world, but by seeing it clearly. They illuminate a path where suffering is transformed into peace, and where wisdom naturally expresses itself as boundless compassion. This thesis, therefore, is both an academic exploration and a personal journey into the heart of Mahāyāna wisdom.

1.1Thesis Objectives

This thesis aims to conduct a comparative study of two foundational texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism: the Diamond Sutra and the Vimalakīrti Sutra. It focuses on six core themes shared by both scriptures: Emptiness (śūnyatā), Non-duality, Language and Reality, Compassion, Critique of Views, and Supreme Wisdom (prajñā). Through this comparison, the thesis seeks to explore how these texts present both shared insights and distinctive methods for understanding the nature of ultimate reality, transcending ego-based delusions, and embodying the path of the Bodhisattva. The objective is to draw out the philosophical depth and practical implications of these sutras, especially regarding how they guide practitioners toward liberation through the realization of emptiness and compassionate engagement with the world.

1.2 Research Methodology

This topic focuses on literary analysis, the author mainly uses the method of explanation, analysis, commentary, quoting some valuable sentences and some metaphors in the Sutra to

clarify the meaning of the topic for this thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Dhyana Master Hsüan Hua

The purpose of this book *A General Explanation of the Vajra Prajña Paramita Sutra* is to elucidate the profound teachings of the sutra and to provide spiritual guidance for the readers, so the commentary by Master Hsuan Hua emphasizes practical applications in daily life. The text focuses on the central theme of emptiness (śūnyatā) and realizes that all phenomena lack inherent existence. The sutra teaches practitioners to let go of attachments to concepts, ideas, and forms, thereby nurturing non-attachment and achieving wisdom by perceiving the true nature of reality. A deep understanding of the emptiness of the self is the key to overcoming suffering. Furthermore, on the Bodhisattva path, the sutra encourages practitioners to follow the Bodhisattva way, seeking enlightenment not only for themselves but for all sentient beings. A true Bodhisattva works selflessly, not attached to the concept of personal benefit or merit. This is a fundamental principle in the teachings on
emptiness and non-self in the Prajnaparamita tradition. It emphasizes a profound understanding that Bodhisattvas work to liberate sentient beings but ultimately realize that there is no fixed "self" or "other" to be liberated, reflecting the deep wisdom of non-dual emptiness. In other words, do not cling to any place; when one deeply perceives and sees that all phenomena are "devoid of self, devoid of others, devoid of living beings, and devoid of a life."[2] Because

[2] Hsüan Hua, Dhyana Master, A General Explanation of the Vajra Prajña Paramita Sutra (San Francisco, CA: Sino-American Buddhist Association, 1974), 201.

enlightenment transcends all distinctions of concepts.

Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh

In general, the book The Diamond that cuts Through Illusion by Thich Nhat Hanh invites readers to delve deeper into the practice of mindfulness and meditation.[3] In this book, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh explains the key concepts of Buddhism, including mindfulness, impermanence, the nature of suffering, and the importance of living in the present moment. He delves into the practice of "Right View." The title refers to the "diamond" of wisdom, serving as a metaphor for insight that can cut through the illusions and attachments that cause suffering for humanity. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes that nothing exists in isolation and the aggregates cannot exist independently; they continuously interact with one another. He provides a clear explanation of the Five Aggregates and their role in constructing the self. He stresses that by seeing through the illusion of a permanent, separate self and understanding the impermanence and interconnectedness of the aggregates, we can free ourselves from suffering. By comprehending this relationship and this emptiness, we can realize that our sense of self is a collection of continuously changing processes rather than a fixed, eternal entity. Understanding this will help practitioners overcome the illusion of self and recognize that this connection is the key to transcending the illusions that cause suffering, allowing them to grasp the true nature of reality. In other words, understanding these concepts can lead to a transformative understanding of life, helping individuals free themselves from illusions.

CHIN-KANG-CHING

[3] Thich Nhat Hanh, The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion: Commentary on the Diamond Sutra, rev. ed. (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2006), 212-219.

The translation of the book “Diamond Sutra” (Chin-Kang-Ching) by William Gemmell in 1912, also known as “Prajna-Paramita,” provides an English translation of this important Mahayana Buddhist text.[4] The structure of the text takes the form of a dialogue between the Buddha and his disciple (Subhuti). Subhuti asks questions about how practitioners should follow the bodhisattva path, how to cultivate wisdom, and how to achieve enlightenment. The Buddha's responses focus on the importance of understanding emptiness, letting go of attachment to forms, and practicing egolessness, guiding practitioners toward enlightenment by cultivating wisdom that transcends conceptual thinking. The core message of the Sutra is that true wisdom and liberation come from seeing through the illusion of self and form and by acting without attachment to concepts or personal gain. Overall, the Sutra deeply teaches themes of the doctrine of non-self (anatta). The Buddha explains that there is no permanent, unchanging self and that clinging to the sense of self is an obstacle to liberation. Understanding that everything is ultimately an illusion, comparing it to dreams, bubbles, or shadows. Practitioners must let go of all attachments to realize the true nature of reality.[5] The Sutra emphasizes the main point about the bodhisattva ideal, which is to practice the idea of saving others or accumulating merit. They act selflessly, without clinging to personal identity or expectations, and their minds no longer cling to concepts of self, nor to concepts such as "merit.

Edward Conze

The Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā-Sūtra (commonly known as the Diamond Sutra) is a foundational Mahayana Buddhist text that presents a profound discourse on the nature of

[4] William Gemmell, The Diamond Sutra (Chin- Kang- Ching), or Prajna- Paramita (London: Trench, Trübner & Co., 1912), 76–77.

[5] William Gemmell, The Diamond Sutra (Chin-Kang-Ching) (London: Luzac & Co., 1912), 24.

wisdom, emptiness, and the practice of non-attachment. The translation and analysis by Edward Conze, one of the leading scholars of Buddhist texts, Conze provides a clear and insightful overview of one of the most important texts in Mahayana Buddhism[6]. The Diamond Sutra is part of the Prajñāpāramitā literature (perfection of wisdom), emphasizing wisdom that transcends ordinary conceptual thought. Conze analyzes its core teachings, focusing on radical ideas about emptiness, non-attachment, and especially the Bodhisattva path. The text emphasizes cutting through conceptual projections, eliminating fixed ideas, and transcending dualistic thinking. Conze emphasizes that this text is not a practical manual but a guide to understanding emptiness. The main idea is one of non-attachment and the denial of an eternal self. This sutra explores the concept of prajñāpāramitā (perfect wisdom), which is essential for achieving enlightenment. Key findings and main points:

Conze focuses on the idea that enlightenment itself is a mental construct that needs to be transcended. The purpose of the sutra is to break the clinging to concepts, even clinging to "enlightenment" His interpretation focuses on breaking down conventional views of reality and guiding practitioners towards direct, non-conceptual understanding of emptiness. Key points in his summary include Emptiness and Non-Self: Conze emphasizes that no phenomenon possesses an independent, inherent nature. Everything including the self is fundamentally empty, meaning that clinging to any fixed identity or entity only prolongs suffering.

The Illusory Nature of Phenomena: The sutra uses the metaphor of a diamond cutting through illusions to indicate that ordinary reality, including our perceptions and attachments, is fundamentally unreal. Wisdom is described as cutting through these illusions, leading to a deeper

[6] Edward Conze, Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, 2nd ed., Serie orientale Roma, vol. 13 (Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1974), 2.

understanding of the true nature of all things. The Diamond Sutra also emphasizes the transformative power of wisdom that is not based on fixed forms or concepts. Wisdom in the Buddhist sense is not an intellectual understanding but a profound awareness of the impermanence and interdependence of all things. Conze stresses that the highest form of wisdom transcends words, concepts, or distinctions. This is "transcendent wisdom" (prajñāpāramitā) that leads to enlightenment. The sutra teaches that true understanding does not come from intellectual analysis but from direct, non-conceptual insight into the nature of reality. Practical application of the teachings: Conze's translation also emphasizes how the Diamond Sutra can be used in meditation practice. The sutra encourages practitioners to engage in mindful meditation to free themselves from the bondage of dualistic thinking, such as good versus bad or existence versus non-existence.

Chung Tai

In the translation of The Diamond Sutra (金剛般若波羅蜜經), translated from the Chinese by Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva, the text emphasizes the impermanent and insubstantial nature of all things. Through the dialogue between the Buddha and Subhuti, the Buddha teaches that wisdom and enlightenment come from overcoming attachment to forms and matter. The sutra highlights the emptiness of the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness), which are the components that make up the existence of a sentient being; they are always changing, interdependent, and lack intrinsic nature.[7] These aggregates are impermanent and arise from causes and conditions, thus demonstrating that there is no eternal, independent self, and what we perceive as "self" is merely a collection of temporary phenomena that are interconnected. The

[7] Chung Tai Translation Committee, trans., The Diamond Sutra (金剛般若波羅蜜經), translated from the Chinese by Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva (5th century) (Sunnyvale, CA: Chung Tai Translation Committee, 2009), 25-50.

sutra emphasizes that belief in a concept of an unchanging, eternal self is an illusion, and recognizing the emptiness of these aggregates helps practitioners transcend dualistic thinking. Understanding this emptiness allows practitioners to let go of attachment to the self and realize the true nature of reality.

Jing Lin 1 and Yishin Khoo 2

The article "Knowing Our True Self and Transforming Suffering toward Peace and Love: Embodying the Wisdom of the Heart Sutra and the Diamond Sutra" by Jing Lin and Yishin Khoo, published in Religions 2022, explores the transformative power of Buddhist teachings, particularly focusing on the Heart Sutra and the Diamond Sutra.[8] These ancient texts emphasize the nature of suffering and offer insights into achieving inner peace and love through spiritual wisdom. The authors discuss how understanding our true self through these teachings can help alleviate suffering and promote compassion, leading to a more harmonious and loving existence. The term "interbeing"[9] describes our deep connection with everything else and the fact that we do not exist independently (Thich Nhat Hanh 2010, 2017). Because everything is always dependent on each other and there is no separate self. The article highlights the importance of embodying these profound principles in daily life for personal and collective transformation.

Monica Bhattacharjee

[8] Jing Lin and Yishin Khoo, "Knowing Our True Self and Transforming Suffering toward Peace and Love: Embodying the Wisdom of the Heart Sutra and the Diamond Sutra," Religions 13, no. 5 (April 28, 2022): 403, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050403.

[9] Jing Lin and Yishin Khoo, "Knowing Our True Self and Transforming Suffering toward Peace and Love: Embodying the Wisdom of the Heart Sutra and the Diamond Sutra," Religions 13, no. 5 (2022): 403, PDF page 7, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050403.

Monica Bhattachrjee's Article "Embracing the Paradox-A Bodhisattva Path" presents a profound exploration of the Bodhisattva path, examining the subtle and inherent paradox of this path[10]. The Bodhisattva way is vast and always present, accessible to everyone without bias, yet it has its own distinct purpose and methodology. It refers to the skillful means (upaya) that the Bodhisattva employs, tailored to the needs of each individual they encounter, using actions, words, and teachings appropriate to the circumstances. Universal compassion balances the need for personal spiritual development with an unwavering commitment to help others overcome suffering. Through wisdom, compassion, skillful means, and selfless dedication. The ideal is that the Bodhisattva path is both flexible and dynamic, requiring continuous learning, wisdom, and compassion, and calls for altruistic actions detached from results. This allows the Bodhisattva to integrate personal growth with the greater goal of helping all beings achieve enlightenment[11]. The paradoxical nature of this path makes it a journey that is both deeply personal and globally significant.

John R. McRae

The Vimalakirti Sūtra is an important text in Mahayana Buddhism, presenting a dialogue between Vimalakirti and various other Buddhist figures. The sutra uses him to illuminate the ideals of the Bodhisattva, showing the relationship between wisdom and compassion, offering practical measures to spread Buddhism throughout society, and presenting a profound and noble perspective on life, transcending the dualistic nature of being and non-being. The imagery of impermanence and fragility is metaphorically represented as "clouds in the sky," "foam,"

[10] Monica Bhattacharjee, "Embracing the Paradox: A Bodhisattva Path," Religions 13, no. 1 (2022): 67, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010067.

[11] Monica Bhattacharjee, "Embracing the Paradox: A Bodhisattva Path," Religions 13, no. 1 (2022): 67, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010067.

"bubbles on the water's surface," and "the fragility of a banana tree". All these symbols indicate the ever-changing nature of reality and the temporary interdependence of all things, guiding practitioners toward a deeper understanding of the true nature of existence. They suggest that nothing has inherent, eternal existence, aligning with the concept of emptiness (shunyata). The sutra guides practitioners to recognize that everything lacks inherent existence, thereby breaking the illusion of separation and distinction. This understanding helps practitioners cultivate compassion and wisdom[12].

Kai Sheng

The core message of the article "Commentarial Interpretations of the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa in the Controversy over Requiring Buddhist Monastics to Pay Homage to the Emperor during the Sui and Tang Dynasties," revolves around the debate during the Sui and Tang dynasties regarding whether Buddhist monks should be required to show respect to the emperor, focusing on the interpretation of the Vimalakirti Nirdesa and its impact on this issue. The article argues that the monks' reverence for Vimalakīrti in the text is a special spiritual act, not a universal rule, and should not be used to justify monks showing respect to secular authorities such as the emperor. This debate highlights the tension between maintaining the autonomy of the Buddhist monastic community (Saṃgha) and the influence of the state[13]. The article emphasizes the necessity to distinguish between special acts, aligned with the spiritual achievements of individuals, and general rules for all practitioners, pointing out the complexity of integrating Buddhist practices

[12] John R. McRae, trans. and ed., The Vimalakīrti Sutra (Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2004), 67.

[13] Kai Sheng, "Commentarial Interpretations of the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa in the Controversy over Requiring Buddhist Monastics to Pay Homage to the Emperor during the Sui and Tang Dynasties," Religions 13, no. 10 (October 19, 2022): 987–1001, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100987.

with state power in a structured feudal society. Ultimately, it underscores the importance of textual interpretation in shaping the relationship between Buddhism and the state, as well as in maintaining the independence of monasteries. Overall, the pro points emphasize the need for spiritual autonomy and careful interpretation of religious texts, while the con points express concerns about the potential erosion of monastic independence and the complexity of combining religious practices with state control.

P.B. Tan

In this book The Scriptures of Unsurpassed Supreme Enlightenment, author P.B. Tan presents profound Buddhist teachings, focusing specifically on the core concept of prajñāpāramitā (perfection of wisdom) and its application in understanding the nature of existence. The text presents a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between matter and "the nature of insubstantiality" or its equivalent as "the nature of essence less-ness."[14] The text asserts that matter is nothing other than the nature of non-self, and vice versa. This teaching helps to overcome dualistic thinking, which often separates matter from metaphysics. P.B. Tan emphasizes that the wisdom of the nature of impermanence should not be merely theoretical or abstract; it must be integrated into everyday life. Applying this wisdom is not an escape from the world but a means to engage with the world skillfully and without attachment. This wisdom is not just theoretical understanding but a practical tool for living wisely, compassionately and in accordance with the deeper truths[15] of the Buddhist path.

Charles Luk (Lu K'uan Yi)

[14] P. B. Tan, The Scriptures of Unsurpassed Supreme Enlightenment (Independent Publishing, 2024), 225.

[15] P. B. Tan, The Scriptures of Unsurpassed Supreme Enlightenment (Kuching, Malaysia: Independently published, 2024), Introduction, pp. 15–20.

The “Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sūtra” by Charles Luk presents the profound teachings of Vimalakirti on how to live a life of compassion and wisdom by transcending dualistic thinking, applying skillful means, and embracing the non-duality of samsara and nirvana.[16] Samsara and nirvana are not two separate worlds or distinct experiences; rather, they are two aspects of the same ultimate truth. Samsara and nirvana are not separate or opposed but are interdependent and complementary aspects. From this perspective, nirvana is not something that exists outside of samsara, but rather the realization of the true nature of samsara. The sutra emphasizes that enlightenment is not limited to monks but can be attained by lay practitioners who apply the Buddha's teachings in their daily lives. By integrating the wisdom of emptiness and impermanence, practitioners are encouraged to engage with the world mindfully and compassionately, embodying the qualities of a bodhisattva in their interactions with all beings.

Toshio Horiuchi

In this article, “Disputed Emptiness: Vimalamitra’s Mādhyamika Interpretation of the Heart Sutra in the Light of His Criticism on Other Schools”, Horiuchi focuses on examining Vimalamitra’s interpretation of the Heart Sūtra through the lens of Madhyamaka philosophy regarding the “Four Aspects of Emptiness,” the statements “form is emptiness,” “emptiness is form,” “form is not different from emptiness,” and “emptiness is not different from form.”[17] The core of Vimalamitra's interpretation lies in his strict application of Madhyamaka principles to emphasize that all phenomena, including the five aggregates (skandhas), lack inherent nature

[16] Charles Luk, The Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra (London: Rider & Co., 1972), chap. IX, “Skillful Mind” section.
[17] Toshio Horiuchi, “Disputed Emptiness: Vimalamitra’s Mādhyamika Interpretation of the Heart Sutra in the Light of His Criticism on Other Schools,” Religions 13, no. 11 (2022): 1067, 4, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13111067.

(svabhāva). He argues that emptiness is not a form of nihilism but a profound recognition of the interdependent and impermanent nature of reality.

An important aspect of his interpretation is the denial of inherent existence while affirming the dynamic and relational nature of everything. He contrasts this with other Buddhist views, such as that of the Yogācāra school, not only to refute them but also to clarify the Madhyamaka position. By using metaphors like illusions, mirrors, space, and bubbles, he illustrates that all phenomena arise and cease without possessing an independent, lasting essence. At its core, the teachings of Vimalamitra serve both a philosophical and a practical function: they not only clarify the Madhyamaka understanding of reality but also help practitioners let go of attachments by recognizing that nothing has an eternal, unchanging essence. This aligns with the broader goal of Buddhism to be liberated from suffering by eliminating the clinging to the illusion of inherent existence.

Robert A. F. Thurman

Robert A.F. Thurman's translation of the Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sūtra conveys the profound message that enlightenment is not confined to monastic life but is accessible to all individuals, including laypeople.[18]Through the character of Vimalakirti, a wise and enlightened layperson the sutra challenges traditional religious hierarchies and demonstrates that true spiritual realization transcends societal and institutional boundaries. Through his translation, Thurman bridges ancient Buddhist wisdom with contemporary spiritual exploration, showing that the teachings of the Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra are not just historical, but timeless guides for personal transformation. The text challenges conventional views, inspires self-inquiry, and provides a path

[18] Robert A.F. Thurman, trans., The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 27.

for integrating wisdom and compassion into daily life. It is especially relevant to modern readers seeking spiritual depth beyond institutional religion, offering a perspective that is both intellectually engaging and deeply transformative.[19]

SHUNRYU SUZUKI

In Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, Shunryu Suzuki presents a path of practice grounded not in striving for attainment, but in recognizing the nature of things as they already are fluid, interconnected, and empty of fixed self. [20] The Guided Edition of the book sharpens this presentation by clearly weaving together core themes: the openness of "beginner's mind," the gradual dissolution of the ego, and the direct realization of non-duality through meditation.[21] For Suzuki, the ego is not something to be forcibly eliminated but gently seen through via mindfulness, meditation, and presence. Approaching practice with a beginner's mind a state of openness and curiosity we relinquish control, observe thoughts without attachment, and begin to see through the illusion of a separate self. This perspective is encapsulated in Suzuki's assertion: " In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but the expert's there are few."[22] This process, unfolding with consistency and sincerity, leads to a deeper sense of unity with all things. Suzuki's insights resonate profoundly with the Diamond Sutra's deconstruction of conceptual

[19] As Buddhism Now observes, the Vimalakirti Sutra "provided canonical proof that enlightenment and salvation were possible even for believers who remained outside monastic orders," a theme Thurman's translation vividly brings forward, along with its critique of monastic privilege and emphasis on lay bodhisattva realization.The Power of Language: Philosophy and Society

[20] Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice, Guided Edition, ed. Trudy Dixon and Richard Baker (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 21.

[21] Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice, Guided Edition, ed. Trudy Dixon and Richard Baker (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 34.

[22] Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice, Guided Edition, ed. Trudy Dixon and Richard Baker (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 21.

views and the Vimalakīrti Sutra's radical embrace of non-duality. In meditation, we drop fixed notions of self and other, attainment and nonattainment, resting instead in a spacious awareness where nothing is grasped and nothing is rejected. To "see things as they are" is not to arrive at a final conclusion, but to recognize the interdependent, empty nature of all phenomena. Suzuki emphasizes this by stating, "When you do something, you should burn yourself completely, like a good bonfire, leaving no trace of yourself"[23]. In this sense, Suzuki's teaching embodies śūnyatā: form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.

Rather than directing us away from the world, Suzuki honors the ordinary breath, posture, daily life as sacred. This reflects the Mahayana view that samsara and nirvana are not two: the very forms of daily life can be expressions of the formless. Like the Bodhisattva in the Vimalakīrti Sutra, the practitioner remains in the world without clinging to it, free from attachment yet deeply engaged. Suzuki's emphasis on direct experience over theory echoes the Buddha's own silence in the face of ultimate questions: truth is not to be found in words, but in wordless clarity. He notes, "The true purpose of Zen is to see things as they are, to observe things as they are, and to let everything go as it goes."[24]

Red Pine

In The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom – Text and Commentaries Translated from Sanskrit and Chinese by Red Pine "Living the Wisdom of Emptiness: Red Pine's Guide through the Diamond Sutra"[25] (Pine 2002, p. 123). In his translation and commentary on the

[23] Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind (New York: Weatherhill, 1970), 34.
[24] Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice, Guided Edition, ed. Trudy Dixon and Richard Baker (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 33.

[25] Red Pine (Bill Porter), The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom – Text and Commentaries Translated from Sanskrit and Chinese (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2002), 123.

Diamond Sutra, Red Pine offers a profound yet accessible interpretation of some of the Buddha's deepest teachings especially those concerning non-duality, emptiness, and interdependence. Through vivid metaphors such as dreams, magic tricks, and chariots, he illustrates the illusory nature of our perceptions. Just as a dream feels real until we awaken, the phenomena we encounter in daily life appear solid and lasting, but are ultimately fleeting and insubstantial. These images help illuminate the sutra's central insight: that all things are inherently empty and interconnected.

What sets Red Pine apart is not only his ability to explain these abstract ideas, but his capacity to breathe life into them. He draws on ancient commentaries while offering his own insights, showing that understanding the Diamond Sutra is not a matter of intellectual grasp alone, it is a path of transformation. His work challenges readers to see through the illusions we live by every day: the illusion of separateness, permanence, and self. In doing so, he invites us to let go of attachments and to live with greater clarity and compassion.

At the heart of the sutra is the concept of emptiness, the realization that all phenomena lack fixed, independent existence. From this insight arises the practice of non-attachment, freeing the practitioner from clinging to transient forms, identities, or ideas. As Red Pine emphasizes, the sutra "cuts through all delusions, illuminates what is real, and cannot be destroyed."[26]The Diamond Sutra also pushes us to transcend dualistic thinking, breaking down conventional oppositions such as self and other, existence and non-existence. Red Pine highlights how this non-dual vision helps us perceive the world not as a set of fixed opposites, but as a fluid web of interconnected realities.

[26] Red Pine (Bill Porter), The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom; Text and Commentaries Translated from Sanskrit and Chinese (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002), 29.

Rather than leading to nihilism, the understanding of emptiness gives rise to compassion. When we realize that all beings are interconnected and impermanent, we begin to act not from ego or expectation, but from care and generosity. Red Pine beautifully notes that "because it's no mind, it has room for compassion. This book is the offering of no mind, born of compassion for all suffering beings."[27] One of the most practical teachings in the sutra is the ideal of generosity without attachment. True giving, as Red Pine interprets, occurs when a Bodhisattva gives without clinging to the act, the gift, or the recipient. "If you understand the emptiness of things," he writes, "you understand there is nothing to be attached to."[28] (Pine 2002, chap. 6, 139.)

Ultimately, Red Pine's work is not just an explanation of a sacred text, it is a guide for living. By making the wisdom of the Diamond Sutra accessible and alive, he encourages us to take these teachings off the page and into our everyday lives. In doing so, we begin to see the world more clearly, act with deeper compassion, and connect with the unity behind all appearances.

Saeko Yazak

In this article, "To Discipline or to Forget: A Sufi–Zen Comparative Analysis of the Self in the Writings of al-Ghazālī and Dōgen", **Saeko Yazak** offers a comparative analysis of how two influential spiritual figures Abu Hamid al-Ghazali from the Sufi tradition and Dogen from Zen Buddhism conceptualize the ego and its transformation on the path to spiritual enlightenment.[29]

[27] Red Pine (Bill Porter), trans., The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2001), 38.

[28] Red Pine (Bill Porter), The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom—Text and Commentaries Translated from Sanskrit and Chinese (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2002), chap. 6, 139.

[29] Saeko Yazaki, "To Discipline or to Forget: A Sufi–Zen Comparative Analysis of the Self in the Writings of al-Ghazālī and Dōgen," *Religions* 15, no. 8 (2024): 929, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080929.

Although both traditions view the ego as an obstacle to enlightenment and emphasize the importance of lived experience and inner transformation, their approaches differ significantly. Yazaki identifies similarities and differences in their approaches:

Similarities: Both traditions view the ego as being antithetical to spiritual enlightenment and emphasize the necessity of lived experience, devotional practice, and inner transformation.

Differences: Al-Ghazālī adopts a dualistic, hierarchical path, in which the ego must be disciplined and controlled to attain a state of closeness to a transcendent God. The ego remains distinct from the jewel, and spiritual development involves moral and spiritual purification. Dōgen, on the other hand, teaches a non-dualistic view, in which the boundary between the self and the other variables is not clear. His path involves forgetting the ego in order to realize the interconnectedness of all existence, in line with a vision of inherent unity rather than separation. Ultimately, Yazaki's writing finds each system's approach to the ego and self-transformation deeply rooted in its broader metaphysical and theological worldview with Sufism emphasizing the transcendence of God, and Zen emphasizing the non-elementary nature of reality.

Conclusion: Each path reflects the unique metaphysical vision of its tradition

Rinpoche Thrangu

In Essentials of Mahamudra: Looking Directly at the Mind by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, a clear introduction to the profound meditation tradition of Mahamudra is presented. [30] The core teachings of the book guide the reader to realize the true nature of the mind through direct experience. By looking directly at the mind without distraction or interference one can discover its inherent purity and clarity. Rinpoche uses the metaphor of a mirror to convey this

[30] Chicago- Style Full Footnote (First Citation)
Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, Essentials of Mahamudra: Looking Directly at the Mind (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1996), 1.

understanding. Just as a mirror reflects many different images without being bound or changed, the mind perceives countless experiences while remaining unstained and unchanging. This analogy emphasizes that the nature of the mind is pure and unaffected by the fleeting phenomena it reflects. By realizing that all phenomena are like reflections in a mirror vivid but ultimately unreal one comes to understand their ephemeral and illusory nature. The core of this teaching is the realization of the unity of appearance and emptiness. Rinpoche explains that all phenomena are manifestations of the luminous emptiness of mind. This insight is crucial in the practice of Mahamudra, where the practitioner is guided to directly experience the nondual nature of mind and phenomena. By resting in the uncontrived awareness of the true nature of mind, one progresses toward the realization of enlightenment. This is the essence of Mahamudra seeing directly and clearly into the nature of mind, free from conceptual hindrances and distractions. This edition clarifies the connection between the Mahamudra teachings and the practice of looking directly into the mind, emphasizing the importance of direct experience over intellectual understanding. It also expands on the theme of non-duality and the realization of emptiness, which is central to Mahamudra.

Kazuaki Tanahashi

In this book, The Heart Sutra: A Comprehensive Guide to the Classic of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Kazuaki Tanahashi presents emptiness as the absence of fixed independent existence emphasizing that all things arise through interdependent causes and conditions[31].This leads to the understanding of inter-being, where no separation exists between self and world. Using the mirror metaphor, he illustrates that form and emptiness are one not opposites, but aspects of the

[31] Kazuaki Tanahashi, The Heart Sutra: A Comprehensive Guide to the Classic of Mahāyāna Buddhism (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2014), 78-79.

same fluid reality. The Five Aggregates are also shown to be empty, ever-changing processes, not fixed parts of a self. Tanahashi encourages direct experience of these insights through mindfulness, aiming to help readers live with non-dual awareness, compassion, and freedom, making the Heart Sutra a living, experiential path rather than just philosophy.

BHIKKU THÍCH HUYỀN CHÂU

The core message of this text, “Leading into the Heart of Diamond" by Bhikku Thich Huyen Chau is to let go of all attachments to self, form, thought, merit, and even to the Dharma itself.[32] Everything we perceive arises dependently, is impermanent, and lacks inherent self nature. Reality cannot be truly grasped or fixed by labels like “self,” “other,” “giver,” or “receiver.” The famous phrase, “A is not A, therefore it is called A,” reflects a non-dual vision of the Middle Way beyond the extremes of being and non-being.[33] This subtle wisdom deconstructs all views, revealing that concepts are provisional tools, not ultimate truths.

To cling to anything, even virtue or insight is to fall back into illusion. But when clinging ceases, suffering ends, and from that space of freedom, compassion flows naturally unforced, selfless, and wise. True liberation comes not through accumulating merit or knowledge, but through directly realizing emptiness, seeing the illusory nature of all phenomena and abiding in clarity without grasping. This is not nihilism, but the highest form of clarity: a mind that abides nowhere, and a heart that gives without holding. The Diamond Sutra points us toward a radical freedom, a life of presence, grounded in wisdom and infused with compassion.

[32] “Thích Huyền Châu, Leading into the Heart of Diamond (Sakya Buddha University, n.d.), part 20–31, 154–190.”

[33] Thích Huyền Châu, Leading into the Heart of Diamond (Sakya Buddha University, n.d.), 139.

Bhikkhu Thích Huyền Châu

This book, “Vimalakīrti – The Radiant Heart Amidst the Mango Grove” by Bhikkhu Thích Huyền Châu is a profound commentary that vividly bring out the living spirit of Vimalakirti. Vimalakirti, a lay bodhisattva, shows that true understanding of the Dharma transcends rituals, social status, and even words.[34]The teaching emphasizes non-duality, emptiness, and direct perception of truth beyond conceptual thinking. The ultimate truth cannot be trapped in language or intellectual concepts. Enlightenment is not about rejecting the world, but about seeing its empty nature and engaging it with boundless compassion. True wisdom lies in realizing the emptiness of all phenomena yet without falling into nihilism because genuine compassion naturally arises from this understanding. The truth is silent, vast, and alive within our own minds. When we awaken to this, we act freely and compassionately, moving through the world unfettered by illusion. In general, the core of Vimalakirti's teachings is: "Neither clinging to the world nor abandoning it seeing its true empty nature, and from that seeing, manifesting infinite compassion.”[35]

2.1 Conclusion

Through studying the Diamond Sutra and the Vimalakīrti Sutra, I have come to understand that true liberation does not lie in escaping the world, but in engaging with it fully while recognizing its illusory and conditioned nature. These texts reveal that the deepest wisdom is often beyond words, the purest compassion arises from non-attachment, and enlightenment is accessible to all regardless of social status or spiritual background.

[34] “Bhikkhu Thích Huyền Châu, Vimalakīrti: The Radiant Heart Amidst the Mango Grove, chap. 9, 565-618.”

[35] Thích Huyền Châu, The Radiant Heart Amidst the Mango Grove (Sakya Buddha University, n.d.), 582.

A central insight is the principle of dependent origination: all phenomena arise due to causes and conditions and lack inherent existence. The self is not a fixed entity but a temporary aggregation of the five skandhas: form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Because all things are impermanent and interdependent, they are fundamentally empty of self-nature. As the Buddha said in the Agama Sūtra, "Who sees dependent origination sees the Dharma; who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha." [36]This understanding dissolves false projections and leads to a direct perception of reality.

The Prajñāpāramitā teachings on emptiness (śūnyatā) clarify that emptiness is not a nihilistic void, but the absence of inherent identity in all things. It is a middle way that transcends extremes of existence and non-existence. The Diamond Sutra describes all phenomena as like dreams or illusions appearing real yet lacking substance. Similarly, the Vimalakīrti Sutra uses paradox and silence to show that ultimate truth cannot be grasped by conceptual thought alone. Ultimately, these teachings help dissolve attachment, ignorance, and fixed views. Realizing emptiness leads to freedom from suffering, the awakening of compassion, and a peaceful mind. This wisdom allows us to transform delusion into clarity and suffering into liberation.

Chapter 3.1: Analysis of Diamond Sutra

The Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra) is one of the most significant scriptures in Mahāyāna Buddhism and forms a central part of the Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom) literature. Structured as a dialogue between the Buddha and his senior disciple Subhūti, the sutra presents profound teachings on non-attachment, the emptiness of all phenomena, and

[36] Pratītyasamutpāda (Āgama Sutra): "Who sees dependent origination sees the Dharma; who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha" (translated from Madhyama Āgama 30 / MN 28) https://www.saet.ac.uk/Buddhism/DependentArising

the cultivation of transcendental wisdom (prajñā). It challenges conventional perceptions of self, reality, and language, urging practitioners to go beyond fixed concepts and dualistic thinking. As a cornerstone of Mahāyāna philosophy and the foundational text for many Zen traditions, the Diamond Sutra emphasizes the realization of ultimate truth through direct insight rather than intellectual understanding alone.

The sutra has a rich historical transmission, particularly in East Asia. It exists in seven major Chinese translations made by six different translators from Sanskrit sources. Among these, the version by the renowned scholar-monk Kumārajīva (circa 5th century CE) has had the most lasting influence, especially in Vietnam, China, and Japan, due to its poetic clarity and doctrinal precision. His rendering of the text became the standard for both monastic and lay study, shaping the development of Buddhist thought and practice across East Asia.

An analysis of the title reveals deep symbolic meaning. The term Sutra (Sanskrit: sūtra) signifies the teachings of the Buddha timeless, universal truths suited to beings of all capacities. Etymologically, it also implies a guiding thread or path, symbolizing the way toward enlightenment and liberation. The word Kim Cương (Diamond or Vajra) represents the indestructible, clear, and penetrating nature of prajñā, or awakened wisdom. Like a diamond, it can cut through ignorance, delusion, and all attachments to false views. The phrase Bát Nhã Ba La Mật Đa (Prajñāpāramitā) refers to the perfection of wisdom that transcends ordinary understanding. Prajñā denotes a deep, intuitive knowledge of the emptiness and interdependence of all things, while Pāramitā means "gone beyond" or "to the other shore," symbolizing the spiritual journey from samsaric suffering to nirvāṇic liberation.

Together, the title conveys the essence of the sutra: the unshakable, liberating wisdom that cuts through illusion and leads to the realization of ultimate reality. This forms the

philosophical and practical basis for the sutra's teachings and sets the stage for a deeper exploration of its message.

Chapter 3.2: Analysis of Vimalakīrti Sūtra

The Vimalakīrti Sūtra, also known as the Sūtra of Inconceivable Liberation, is an important Mahāyāna Buddhist scripture originating from central India. It was first compiled around 150–200 CE and quickly gained wide popularity. The sutra was translated into Chinese six times, most famously by the great master Kumārajīva in 406 CE. His translation (Taisho 475) is especially revered for its clarity and has become foundational in East Asian Buddhism.

The sutra presents profound teachings that transcend conventional understanding. Its core focuses on non-duality, emptiness (śūnyatā), and direct realization beyond language and categories. It teaches that ultimate truth cannot be fully grasped by words, but points instead toward direct, living experience.

At the heart of the sutra is Vimalakīrti, whose name means "Immaculate Fame." He is portrayed as an extraordinarily enlightened lay bodhisattva residing in Vaiśālī. To assist Śākyamuni Buddha, he manifested illness as a skillful means (upāya) to teach profound Dharma. His illness serves as a metaphor to reveal the illusions of existence and non-existence, eternity, and cessation, thus challenging the typical attachments of Hīnayāna (Śrāvakayāna) practitioners and those outside the Buddhist path.

The sutra emphasizes that enlightenment is not confined to monks or the monastic elite; laypeople, brahmins, kings, and individuals from all walks of life can realize the Dharma. Vimalakīrti embodies the Mahāyāna ideal: fully engaging with the world while seeing through its empty, illusory nature with compassion and wisdom.

The dramatic dialogues between Vimalakīrti and the Buddha's great disciples highlight the limitations of the Śrāvakayāna view and celebrate the boundless scope of the Bodhisattva path. Despite their exalted status, even the Buddha's senior disciples hesitate to confront Vimalakīrti, acknowledging his overwhelming wisdom.

A climactic moment occurs when Vimalakīrti responds to a deep question about non-duality with complete silence, an act symbolizing that ultimate truth lies beyond all conceptualizations. Throughout the sutra, humor, satire, paradox, and fantastical imagery are used as skillful means to shake the reader free from rigid attachments. The text repeatedly critiques narrow views of liberation and invites a higher vision: true wisdom is not in escaping the world, but in penetrating it with insight and compassion. The Vimalakīrti Sūtra has inspired a rich legacy of commentaries, philosophical treatises, plays, and artworks throughout Buddhist history. Its profound themes of non-duality, compassion, and universal accessibility to enlightenment have left an enduring spiritual and cultural mark.

Ultimately, the Vimalakīrti Sūtra invites us to realize that the truest wisdom is wordless, the deepest compassion arises from non-attachment, and enlightenment is available to all beings. The sutra is not a doctrinal manual, but a spiritual koan—a mirror that both reflects and shatters our conceptual limitations.

In short, the Vimalakīrti Sūtra is not a text to be understood from the outside. It is a boundless gate, inviting the practitioner to step beyond words, beyond self and other, into the inconceivable liberation that is already present.

Chapter 4: Comparison of the Diamond Sutra

4.1 Emptiness

In the Diamond Sutra, the Buddha teaches that all dharmas are “empty” and have no self-nature. Phenomena are merely aggregates that arise through causes and conditions, without any fixed, independent nature. Even the Dharma itself, the Buddha’s teachings, should not be clung to.This famous saying captures this: “Even the Dharma must be abandoned, let alone non-Dharma.”“Dharma” refers to the Buddha’s teachings, which are considered skillful means (upāya), like a raft used to cross a river. They are not the ultimate truths themselves. Clinging to the Dharma is still forming attachments.

The teaching of the Dharma is empty, a provisional tool, not an end in itself. So we should not mistake the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself. True enlightenment is freedom from all attachments, whether good or bad, Dharma or non-Dharma. Even this realization must arise from a mind that is not fixed, not grasping. Bodhisattvas save countless beings, but realize that no beings are truly saved, because both persons and dharmas are empty.

So the ultimate freedom is to move through the world with the compassionate activity of a natural, traceless flow, leaving no burden on oneself, not clinging to teachings, not even clinging to the notion of Emptiness. We must not misunderstand the word "Emptiness" (śūnyatā) in the Prajnaparamita Sutras as just nothingness. Emptiness is not the opposite of existence; it transcends both existence and nonexistence. It is located right where the phenomenon is present, visible to the eye, tangible to the hand, but has no independent, fixed self-nature. Although something is seen or touched, it is said to be empty because it has no separate nature, it exists dependently. The Prajnaparamita teachings describe Emptiness because phenomena arise from causes and conditions, not from any inherent nature. Therefore, Emptiness is also called Dependent Origination (pratītyasamutpāda) or Emptiness Nature. For example, consider a pen. What is its nature? We cannot say that ink is nature, nor can we say that the tip of the pen is the

subject. No part is the subject. Only the combination of the parts makes the pen appear. When the parts come together, conventionally there is a pen; when separated, the pen is no longer a pen. Everything exists only through causes and conditions, without any independent, permanent core.Thus, Emptiness is not the negation of phenomena but the correct view that everything arises dependently and has no self-nature. When we see that things have no inherent reality, we have nothing to cling to. As the Buddha taught in the Diamond Sutra: "If anyone thinks that the Tathagata comes or goes, sits or lies down, he has misunderstood."[37] Thus, even names like Buddha, sentient beings, or Dharma are just names applied to empty phenomena.

In short, phenomena do not really appear or disappear in a fixed way because they are always empty. Emptiness is not annihilation; it points to the absence of permanent identity.

When we see that everything arises dependently and that nothing exists independently, we understand that the self is also just a combination of the five aggregates (skandhas). From this realization arises fearless compassion and wisdom, a dynamic, living, non-inert freedom. Emptiness is like open space: it does not obstruct anything and contains everything. Emptiness is not non-existence, but the transcendence of both existence and nonexistence.

Likewise, the Bodhisattva, realizing the emptiness of self and phenomena, moves freely through saṃsāra, helping sentient beings without falling into the view of self, others, or achievement. Thus, true practice is to act with complete compassion while knowing that there is no "doer," no "actant," and no "action." Compassionate action arises naturally from the spontaneous, non-attachment, fearless, and free realization of Emptiness.

[37] Hsüan Hua, A General Explanation of the Vajra Prajñā Paramita Sutra (San Francisco: Sino- American Buddhist Association, Inc., 1974), 61.

4.1.1 The True Nature of Things

To explain the true nature of things, let's take a closer look at the book "The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion" [38]by Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh, presents Interbeing as the heartbeat of the Diamond Sutra. He teaches that the true nature of reality is interbeing and emptiness not annihilation, but a living, all-encompassing connection. Practicing interbeing is cutting through illusion, opening the door to wisdom and compassion. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes that nothing exists independently; everything exists with and through everything else. "Interbeing" is his popular, easy-to-understand term for emptiness (śūnyatā) and altruism (anātman). "One" is the result of "all," and "all" makes "one" possible.

We can observe the nature of interbeing and interdependence in all seeds and formations: a flower cannot exist by itself but must be interdependent on sunlight, rain, earth, and many other conditions. All phenomena arise in this way. As the Buddha taught: "This exists because that exists."[39]According to Buddhism, phenomena continually arise and disappear, never stopping. Through dependent origination (paticca samuppāda), a phenomenon arises not from a single cause, but from countless conditions — and those conditions themselves depend on other conditions. Therefore, every phenomenon is related, near or far, to everything else. Everything is a combination of causes and conditions; the idea of a separate self is an illusion.

The self is simply a combination of the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness) and does not exist independently. When we look deeply into a flower, we see the entire universe within it. The flower "inter-is" with the sun, the rain, the earth, and countless other conditions. Without them, the flower could not exist. Therefore, it has no

[38]Thích Nhất Hạnh, The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion: Commentaries on the Prajñāpāramitā Diamond Sutra(Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2006), 34.
[39] Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1998), 221.

separate, independent self; it embodies the true nature of inter-being. Inter-being is not just a concept; it is the true nature of everything that is fluid, connected, and dynamic. According to Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, when we realize inter-being, we stop seeing ourselves as separate and stop treating others as fundamentally "other." Compassion arises naturally because your happiness and my happiness are deeply intertwined. Therefore, inter-being is healing for both ourselves and the world. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches that understanding inter-being dissolves individual suffering (isolation, fear, anger) and heals collective suffering (violence, injustice, environmental destruction). Healing happens because we live from connection, not illusion. In his view, individual liberation and collective healing are inseparable. You cannot be truly free while clinging to the idea of separateness.

In short, Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching of interbeing is one of the most profound and beautiful expressions of Buddhist wisdom for the modern world. He translates profound philosophical insights (emptiness, dependent origination) into ways of seeing and living every day. Interbeing shows us: to live fully is to live in connection.Understanding emptiness is to love more deeply, not to retreat into cold detachment. Healing ourselves is the beginning of healing the world, and healing the world heals ourselves. For me, interbeing is not just an explanation of emptiness but also a lived experience of it where wisdom and compassion naturally arise together, like the two wings of a bird.

4.1.2 The role of Bodhisattva and Non-duality:

The Prajnaparamita Sutra famously states, "Form is emptiness; emptiness is form," emphasizing the non-dual nature of reality. In his translation and commentary, Kazuaki Tanahashi emphasizes the emptiness, inseparability, and interpenetration of form and emptiness,

suggesting that all phenomena are manifestations of a single, boundless reality."[40] To convey this more accurately in English and avoid the common misunderstanding of "emptiness" as nothingness, Tanahashi deliberately chose the term "boundless," a word that evokes openness, infinity, and deep connection. His translation offers a fresh, accessible perspective on the Prajnaparamita Sutra, inviting readers to experience firsthand the profound teaching that no phenomenon possesses an independent, inherent existence. Instead, everything arises dependently, in a reciprocal relationship, with no fixed essence. This understanding is consistent with the Mahayana view that ultimate reality transcends dualistic categories such as existence and non-existence, self and other, or birth and death. One of Tanahashi's striking translations, "Form is not separate from the infinite; the infinite is not separate from form. Form is infinite; the infinite is form," illustrates this view. [41] The term "infinite" in this context does not denote a metaphysical essence but instead points to the infinite, relational, empty nature of all phenomena. Non-dualism here means that the conceptual boundaries we impose between self and other, subject and object, are illusory constructs, not ultimate truths. When things are seen as empty of fixed identity, apparent separations dissolve. What we call "I" is revealed as a fluid, conditioned process, essentially no different from anything else. This realization is not only intellectual but also transformative: when the illusion of separateness disappears, compassion naturally arises, and the practitioner embodies the Mahayana path of wisdom and altruistic action. In this view, the understanding of emptiness and nonduality is not abstract philosophy but a living insight into the nature of existence.

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[40] Kazuaki Tanahashi, *The Heart Sutra: A Comprehensive Guide to the Classic of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, trans. and commentary (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2014), 45–46.

[41] Tanahashi, The Heart Sutra: A Comprehensive Guide to the Classic of Mahayana Buddhism (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2014).

The realization of nonduality is not an end in itself but the foundation from which the bodhisattva's activity arises. In the Prajnaparamita Sutras, a bodhisattva is one who has a profound understanding of emptiness yet remains fully engaged in the world for the benefit of all sentient beings. This paradox lies at the heart of the bodhisattva spirit: acting without attachment, serving without ego, and liberating others while knowing that ultimately there is no "self" or "other" to liberate. The bodhisattva is likened to a dreamer who, in a dream, knows that he is dreaming, and therefore responds with compassion rather than clinging. As the sutra says, "He develops the mind of enlightenment without grasping at anything."[42]This reflects the union of wisdom (prajñā) and compassion (karuṇā), an understanding of emptiness balanced by boundless concern. Tanahashi's use of the word "boundless" here is significant, because the bodhisattva's compassion, like reality itself, is boundless and unfettered by ego, identity, or preference. A bodhisattva does not discriminate between friend and foe, between self and other; instead, his activity is like rain falling evenly on every field, nourishing each field without bias. Although he sees sentient beings as empty, he responds to suffering as if it were real because compassion arises naturally when clinging to a separate self is dissolved. This is the spirit of the Bodhisattva: walking the middle path with an open heart and eyes, neither grasping at existence nor turning away from the world. In this light, the Bodhisattva plays an important role as a living bridge between ultimate truth and conventional truth. They embody the ability to live in this world teaching, eating, breathing, healing…etc…while no longer being bound by dualistic thinking. Their presence teaches that the realization of emptiness is not a withdrawal but a deep engagement with the world. Bodhisattvas are said to be "like an illusion," not because they are mistaken, but because they are free from illusion. Thus, the Bodhisattva becomes the full

[42] *The Diamond Sūtra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), chap. 14: "Therefore does the sūtra say: 'Develop a mind which rests on no thing whatever.'"

blossoming of Prajnaparamita not as a distant ideal, but as a reflection of our own deepest potential.

In today's world, the bodhisattva path offers a radical and compassionate framework for living amid complexity, conflict, and uncertainty. Realizing non-duality does not mean withdrawing from life or denying its pain; rather, it means seeing through the illusion of fixed identities, rigid views, and separateness and responding with clarity and love. In everyday life, this might manifest as listening without defensiveness, helping without self-praise, and acting with courage even when the outcome is uncertain. A bodhisattva might be a caregiver who serves with patience, a teacher who uplifts without ego, or a protester against injustice without hatred. As Thich Nhat Hanh has said. "The next Buddha may take the form of a community," pointing to the idea that enlightenment is collective, relational, and embodied." [43]In spiritual practice, cultivating the bodhisattva spirit means returning to the present moment again and again, not to escape the world, but to meet it with presence, insight, and compassion. Meditation, ethical conduct, and generosity are no longer duties, but expressions of a heart that no longer clings. When we stop clinging to a separate "I," we can meet others as we truly are. In this way, the Prajnaparamita teachings remind us that true wisdom is not cold or distant, but warm, flexible, and yet sensitive. Bodhisattvas do not wait for perfection before helping others walk the path as they themselves do, carrying the torch of insight through the darkness, not to boast of their own light, but to light the way for all beings.

[43] Thích Nhất Hạnh, The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation(Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1998), 210.

Emptiness
All phenomena lack inherent existence
The True Nature of Things
Perceiving reality beyond concepts and distinctions
Diamond Sutra and Vimalakirti Sutra
Non-Duality
Following the path of non-attachment and wisdom
Bodhisattva Path
Working selflessly for the enlightenment of all beings

Figure 1: Commentary Topics

Figure 2: Identification and Metaphor

Emptiness (Sūnyatá)
Non-Attachment and Non-Duality
• Nothing possesses an inherent or independent essence– –not the self or phenomena
• Illusions compared to dreams, shadows, bubbles, mirages
• Cutting through dualistic thinking (self/other, good/bad) existence/non-existence)
• Not grasping at outcomes or identities
DIAMOND SUTRA
The Bodhisattva Ideal
• Helping others from compassion
• Helping others from compassion
• Selflessly, without clinging to self, other, or merit

CONCLUSIONS
Transformative understanding of life
THE TRUE NATURE OF THINGS
Enlightenment transcends all distinctions Perceiving all phenomenas's devoid of self and others
EMPTINESS
All phenomena lack inherent existence Realizing the true nature of reality Overcoming suffering through understanding the emptiness of the self
NON-DUALITY
Ultimate wisdom reflects non-dual emptiness
Liberation beyond concepts of "self" "other" Liberation beyond concepts-of "self" other"
BODHISATTVA PATH
Practice of selfless compassion
Seeking enlightenment for all sentient beings

Figure 3: Idea and Essence

Table 1: Comparative Summary-Diamond Sutra vs. Vimalakīrti Sutra

Theme	Diamond Sutra	Vimalakīrti Sutra	Common Ground / Difference
Emptiness (śūnyatā)	All dharmas and beings are ultimately empty; names and forms are illusory (illusion-like).	Emptiness is the basis of non-dual reality; it is the "inconceivable liberation."	Both assert emptiness as the foundation of liberation and reality, denying inherent existence.
Non-duality	Rejects dualities like self/other, good/bad; one practices without attachment to dual concepts.	Chapter 9 (In The Radiant Heart Amidst the Mango Grove by Thich Huyen Chau) explicitly lists 31 dualities to be transcended; silence is the highest expression of non-duality.	Vimalakīrti offers a more dramatic and explicit treatment; Diamond Sutra is subtler.
Language & Reality	Language is a tool but ultimately deceptive; names do not refer to real essences.	Language is limited; true wisdom is beyond speech (e.g., Vimalakīrti's silence shows ultimate truth).	Both warn against reifying language and concepts; ultimate truth is beyond words.

Compassion	**A bodhisattva helps beings while realizing there are no real beings to save true compassion is selfless.**	**Vimalakīrti embodies "skillful means" (upāya) with profound compassion; he teaches laypeople and monks alike.**	**Compassion without attachment is essential; both teach *non-self compassion*.**
Critique of Views	**Views—including the Dharma—are to be abandoned; even "no-view" should not become a fixed view.**	**Vimalakīrti critiques Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, and others for clinging to limits.**	**Both reject rigid clinging even to Buddhism itself; dynamic, free insight is valued.**
Ultimate Wisdom	**Realizing non-self, non-dharma, and no attainment is wisdom; the wise act without ego.**	**Wisdom is beyond conceptualization; true knowing is silent, direct, and immediate (e.g., "thunderous silence").**	**Wisdom = realization of emptiness and non-duality; expressed through silence and compassion**

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings/Conclusion

Through a comparative study of the six central themes of emptiness, non-duality, language and reality, compassion, critique of views, and ultimate wisdom, this thesis aims to clarify how each text expresses the path to liberation and the realization of ultimate truth.

Both sutras regard emptiness as the basis of liberation. In the Diamond Sutra, all phenomena and beings are described as being like illusions, lacking in inherent nature. Forms

and names are provisional designations, not ultimate reality. The Vimalakirti Sutra also asserts that all phenomena are empty, but it presents this understanding as the gateway to "inconceivable liberation a freedom that transcends the boundaries of conventional thought."[44]

Regarding non-duality, both texts reject dualistic thinking, but they express this rejection in different ways. The Diamond Sutra subtly undermines dualism by stating that things are what they are precisely because they are not a method rooted in paradox. In contrast, the Vimalakirti Sutra boldly presents a list of 31 dualities to be transcended, culminating in Vimalakirti's "thunderous silence," which transcends all conceptual frameworks. This silence serves as a living expression of non-duality that cannot be grasped by thought and is not limited by words. In their treatment of language and reality, both texts point to the limitations of words. The Diamond Sutra undermines the authority of language by showing that names do not correspond to fixed essences. Likewise, the Vimalakirti Sutra emphasizes that true understanding lies beyond the reach of words. Vimalakirti's silence is not a lack of teaching, but the highest form of teaching the communication that ultimate truth cannot be spoken, only realized.

Compassion is an integral part of both sutras and is always framed within an understanding of emptiness. In the Diamond Sutra, the Bodhisattva helps all beings while knowing that no beings inherently exist to be saved demonstrating compassion without ego or attachment. The Vimalakirti Sutra demonstrates compassion through skillful means (upāya), as Vimalakirti interacts compassionately and wisely with monks, laypeople, and even deities, showing that wisdom and love are inseparable. On the subject of critique of views, both sutras thoroughly challenge fixed views. The Diamond Sutra teaches that even clinging to the Dharma must be abandoned. Clinging to "no view" is still holding a view. The Vimalakirti Sutra goes

[44] Thích Huyền Châu, The Radiant Heart Amidst the Mango Grove (Sakya Buddha University, n.d.), 839.

further by directly satirizing Śāriputra and other prominent disciples for their narrow, dualistic interpretations of the Dharma. This sutra breaks down spiritual complacency and reaffirms that insight must be alive, flexible, and responsive.

Ultimately, the ultimate wisdom in both sutras is described as the direct, non-conceptual realization of emptiness and selflessness. The Diamond Sutra says that the wise person acts without attachment, knowing that there is no attainment and no self to attain it. The Vimalakirti Sutra expresses this wisdom through demonstrative teachings, especially silence, showing that ultimate understanding is not intellectual or dogmatic, but immediate insight that transcends thought.

In short, both texts ultimately serve the same goal: to liberate sentient beings from ignorance, self-grasping, and suffering. The sutras teach that true wisdom lies not in doctrines or labels, but in the living realization of the emptiness of all phenomena. This realization does not lead to nihilism or detachment from life, but opens the heart to compassionate engagement with the world. In this way, the Diamond Sutra and the Vimalakirti Sutra complement each other. One offers the razor-sharp sword of wisdom; the other, the mirror of paradox and demonstration. Together, they illuminate the Middle Way where emptiness is not a void, but a luminous space in which compassion, wisdom, and freedom arise effortlessly.

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